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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
31 January 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in South Vietnam No. 5
(As of 12 NOON EST)

The focus of Communist military action appears to have shifted back to the northern part of the country on the night of 31 January. Major thrusts were mounted against cities along the central coast. It appears possible that the enemy is attempting to whip saw the allied reaction, perhaps in the hope of impeding the friendly reaction.

More fighting, however, is also reported in the Saigon area, while some of the Delta towns are apparently also still under enemy pressure. Reports indicated that fresh enemy attacks were expected in some areas of the Delta on the night of 31 January.

1. Saigon: Information on the situation in the city has been reported through about 10 PM local Saigon time 31 January. In general, the scene of the action has shifted to the southwest part of the town, with Communist elements dug in and apparently besieged at various points, including the bank of the Kinh Doi river and possibly the An Quang pagoda. Other fighting is also reported in the Gia Dinh sector near Ton Son Nhut airfield. Friendly air action has apparently been conducted in this area and has resulted in at least one fire in a residential section.

2. It is not clear whether the fighting now reported in Saigon represents the rear guard action of retreating Communist elements, or the attempted entry of new Communist components into the area.

[redacted] the enemy planned to renew his attack on the night of the 31st, using in part fresh

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elements from Communist units to the southwest, presumably from Long An Province. The Vietnamese authorities were anticipating contact with the enemy elements in this area.

3. The only ground fighting possibly still underway in the central city area was reported during the afternoon of the 31st (local Saigon time) in the area of the presidential palace where police were said to have trapped and besieged some VC remnants in a residential home.

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5. It appears that American casualties in the attack on the US Embassy may have been higher than earlier reported. At least 4 US military police were killed and possibly over 20 wounded. One Marine was also killed and 7 wounded.

6. In the attack on the main Saigon radio station, the enemy apparently penetrated the building. Reportedly, the enemy intended to broadcast a message of general revolt to the local populace. The enemy reportedly seized several other radio stations in the attacks on central coastal cities on 30 January. He probably also intended to use these facilities to broadcast calls for support from the populace at large. There is no detailed information as yet on this aspect, however.

7. The Delta: No major new attacks have been reported in the Delta area in information received through about 10 PM local time on 31 January. The situation in various provincial capitals, however, is not yet wholly clear. It appears that the enemy offensive in this area also involved numerous attacks on smaller district towns and allied facilities, some of which were reportedly overrun. Following is the current situation in the Delta towns and provinces for which some detailed information is available:

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7. Soc Trang (Ba Xuyen Province): On the late afternoon of the 31st, light fighting was reportedly still going on in this town, with more expected tonight. The airfield at Soc Trang was attacked, apparently on the 31st.

8. Bac Lieu (Bac Liu Province): The town was quiet on the afternoon of the 31st after a mortar and small arms attack. Possibly there was no ground probe in this area.

9. Ca Mau (An Xuyen): Some firing was still going on in Ca Mau on the afternoon of 31 January, but was reported sporadic. More fighting was expected at night.

10. Can Tho (Phuong Dinh Province): This town was under friendly control on the afternoon of 31 January, but heavy fighting was reported throughout parts of the province. The VC possibly still held a few strongpoints in the town, including one pagoda.

11. Rach Gia (Kien Giang Province): The situation had settled down here on the afternoon of the 31st after a day of sporadic mortar and small arms fire.

12. My Tho (Dinh Tuong Province): On the afternoon of the 31st the situation was improving, although some firing was still reported. Heavy maneuver activity was also reported throughout the province. The district town of Cai Be was mortared.

13. Ben Tre (Truc Giang): In this capital of Kien Hoa Province the VC penetrated the city and engaged the ARVN in street fighting. The enemy had been driven to the outskirts of the town. The District towns of Ba Tri and Binh Dai in Kien Hoa were also mortared.

14. Tra Vinh (Vinh Binh Province): On the evening of the 31st, some local US authorities considered the situation "serious" and had requested troops from the ARVN 9th Division.

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15. Vinh Long Province: An estimated 3 enemy companies were involved in the attack on the Vinh Long air base. Five aircraft were damaged. The district town of Vinh Liem in this province was reportedly overrun.

16. Chau Phu (Chan Doc Province): According to an unconfirmed report, this provincial town had been overrun on the 31st. The deputy province chief was reported missing. Reinforcements were enroute, and all US civilians were being evacuated.

Ist Corps Area

17. Quang Tri City: Communist forces have reportedly occupied positions to the north, east, and west of the Quang Tri provincial capital, and a major assault was expected on the night of 31 January. An enemy battalion which entered the city during the night of 30 January has been driven to the suburbs by ARVN reaction forces. Three ARVN battalions are presently on the north side of the city with another allied battalion in position to the east. The security situation is still considered in good shape, under the prevailing circumstances.

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There had been earlier fragmentary reports [REDACTED] that at least two Viet Cong sapper companies had penetrated the Hue citadel, were patrolling streets inside the citadel, and had hoisted a Viet Cong flag atop the main citadel building.

19. Da Nang: Small arms, mortar, and artillery continued through the night of 30-31 January south of Da Nang city where the US Marine airbase near Marble Mountain absorbed its second consecutive rocket attack. Da Nang airbase is fully operative after brief closure for civilian traffic on the morning of 30 January. There have been no Viet Cong-initiated incidents or acts of terrorism within Da Nang city itself. Demonstrations and a rally were instigated by the enemy on 30 January at Tin Hoa Pagoda in an attempt to persuade participants that the

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Viet Cong had won a significant victory and taken over the city. This enemy propaganda play generated little popular support, and GVN authorities made a number of arrests.

US authorities in Da Nang feel the Viet Cong attack against Da Nang city failed in its initial thrust, and has reduced enemy capabilities in the area to mortar/rocket harassment of military targets combined with isolated and uncoordinated sapper-type actions.

20. Quang Nam: South Korean forces have apparently dislodged an estimated force of 300 Viet Cong heavily dug-in and interspersed with the civilian population at the east end of Hoi An, the Quang Nam provincial capital. The city has been declared under allied control.

21. Quang Tin: The provincial capital of Tam Ky came under heavy mortar, small arms, and ground attack early on 31 January by elements of the 21st NVA Regiment reinforced by two additional NVA battalions. The attack was repulsed, however, with enemy losses reported in excess of 400 killed (body count), the majority of whom were young boys. Although the situation is now relatively quiet, Communist forces remain on the outskirts of Tam Ky, with further enemy offensive activity anticipated on the night of 31 January.

22. Quang Ngai City: The Quang Ngai provincial capital, along with three nearby district headquarters, came under heavy enemy attack during the early morning hours of 31 January. According to late reports, the assault was repulsed, with very heavy Viet Cong and relatively light allied casualties resulting. Elements of the 2nd ARVN Division have been committed to bolster the area defenses. Small pockets of enemy troops are apparently still active in the city, but they are believed to pose no serious threat at this time.

The Central Highlands

23. Kontum City: The situation remains unclear; however, at last report two enemy battalions continued to control the Kontum provincial capital. Tactical air strikes have been launched against a concentration of some 600-700

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city is under heavy mortar fire. Heaviest action continues to focus on the MACV compound. US personnel report that VC within the city have been seen changing into civilian clothes. US airborne and ARVN reaction forces are attempting to bloc enemy routes of withdrawal from the city.

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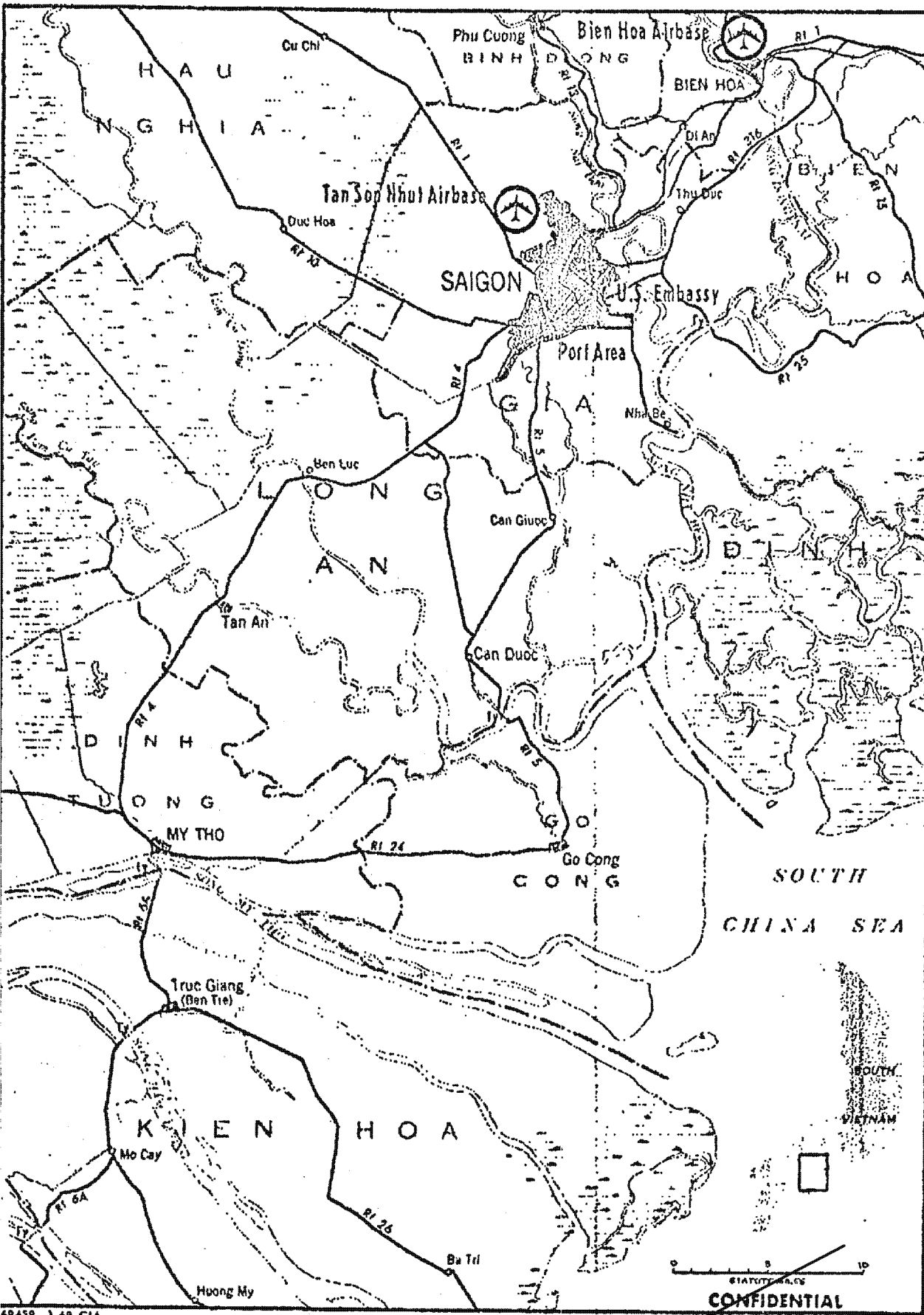
31. Communist propaganda is continuing to give heavy play to the upsurge in military activity in the South and stressing that it shows the US cannot accomplish its objectives. The unstated, but clear implication, is that the US must resort to a political compromise.

32. Hanoi has made no attempt, however, to portray the current offensive as a conclusive or final stage in the struggle, but is treating it as further proof that Communists forces hold the initiative and still are able to launch large-scale, coordinated attacks. A broadcast on 31 January said the upsurge in Communist military activity is a continuation of success achieved during the past month.

33. There has been no Chinese Communist commentary on the situation as yet. Soviet broadcasts, however, are carrying both Western and Vietnamese Communist accounts of the action and stressing the US predicament. A commentary in Pravda on 31 January says the Communist have launched a "new major offensive" which disproves "US propaganda" that Viet Cong forces are "depleted."

34. First accounts from the French press take the line that by launching a "general offensive" the Communists have again successfully demonstrated their military capabilities and shown that the US has reached an "impasse."

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